

DIEBACK AND CANKER OF CAMELLIA

J. J. McRitchie

Camellias have been called "the aristocrats of southern gardens," with over 3000 named varieties of *Camellia japonica* and *C. sasanqua* (3). Their dark green glossy leaves and beautiful flowers, ranging from white and pink to red, add beauty to many Florida gardens.

One of the most common diseases affecting camellias is dieback, caused by the fungus *Glomerella cingulata* (Stone.) Spauld. and von Schrenk. The disease affects most cultivars of *C. japonica* and *C. sasanqua* (1). It is characterized by the dying back of twigs and branches, and often by the formation of cankers, depending upon the time of year, the age and size of the affected plant part, and the point of infection (1,4). A wound or natural opening is essential for the fungus to become established, with leaf scars serving as the most common point of entry (2).

In the early spring, infected young succulent shoots may wilt and die suddenly. The leaves turn dark brown and remain attached to the shoot. Cankers are not usually visible in this stage. During other seasons of the year, young twigs and branches also may die suddenly, but cankers are almost always associated with this phase of camellia dieback. The cankers may range from slightly depressed areas in the bark to well defined cankers at the base of dead twigs (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Dieback of *Camellia japonica* showing wilted leaves attached to the dead shoot, and canker formation at the base of the shoot.

Where a large branch or the main stem has been damaged, often-by lawnmowers, large cankers may develop. If the main stem is entirely girdled, the plant frequently dies. Partially girdled branches show chlorotic foliage and dieback of small twigs.

Symptoms of Camellia dieback may be easily confused with those caused by *Phytophthora* root rot. Further, it has been observed that the root rot pathogen may have an additive effect on the severity of *Glomerella* dieback.

CONTROL. Since leaf scars are the most common point of fungus entry, protective sprays of a fungicide such as Dithane M-45 80% WP or Captan 50% WP at 2 lb/100 gal water plus a spreader-sticker should be applied during the period of greatest leaf fall. Cankers should also be pruned, followed by a fungicide spray.

Literature Cited

1. Baxter, L. W., Jr. 1972. Infection studies and source of resistance to *Glomerella* dieback and canker of camellia. *Phytopathology* 62:806. (Abstr.)
2. Baxter, L. W., and A. G. Plakidas. 1954. Dieback and canker of camellias caused by *Glomerella cingulata*. *Phytopathology* 44:129-133.
3. Bush, C. S. 1969. Flowers, shrubs and trees for Florida homes. Fla. Dept. Agr. and Cons. Serv. Bull. 195. p. 132-136.
4. Forsberg, J. L. 1963. Diseases of ornamental plants. Univ. Illinois Coll. Agr. Special Pub. No. 3. p. 35-36.